



## Writing and Submitting an Op-Ed

One media tool that is effective in raising awareness about **National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)** is an “opposite editorial,” or “op-ed.” Op-eds are a compelling and expressive method of presenting points of view by experts and people in the community, while supported by facts and figures. This approach to promoting **Recovery Month** gives you the opportunity to personally address substance use disorders, treatment, recovery, and the renewed outlook on life that can result from a commitment to long-term recovery. You also can showcase this year’s theme, *“Join the Voices for Recovery: Real People, Real Recovery.”*

**Op-ed Fact:** Writing an op-ed turns you into the columnist and allows you to express your views and present the importance of supporting those in recovery.

## Eight Tips to Help You Write Your Op-ed

1. **Stick to a single idea** to effectively persuade readers and keep their attention focused on the most important issues.
2. **Use a local story of recovery** to add a personal touch to your op-ed. If possible, also include a family member’s healing journey. Referring to a local or national event recently in the news also can help bring your story to life.
3. **Plan out your op-ed** to stay focused and keep it structured.
4. **Speak your mind.** You are being asked to contribute because you have something important to say.
5. **Back up your opinions** with up-to-date facts that are relevant to both the field and your community. Statistics or study results add credibility to your argument, but try not to overwhelm readers by burying your story in numbers.
6. **Be concise and captivating** by using short, yet compelling, words. Newspapers are written for readers at a fifth-grade level, so remember to avoid using terms and acronyms unfamiliar to those outside the field. Also, do not write more than 600 words; if possible, keep it to 500 words.
7. **Consult the Recovery Month planning partners** from your state or local area for resources or quotes. See the list of **Recovery Month** partners included in the “Resources” section of this planning toolkit.
8. **Include** your full name and a brief description of who you are and what you do at the end of the op-ed, illustrating what makes you an expert on the subject that you are writing about. Make sure to include contact information with your submission.

**Resources** to help you write your op-ed include:

- **The op-ed template** at the end of this document, which can be adapted to fit the nuances of your story. Make sure you edit the placeholders in the brackets as necessary. Electronic versions of these materials and other templates are available on the **Recovery Month** Web site at [www.recoverymonth.gov](http://www.recoverymonth.gov).



- **The 2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings**, published by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This is the premier source for up-to-date national trends on substance use, dependence, and treatment, and it is available on the SAMHSA Web site at [www.oas.samhsa.gov/nsduh.htm](http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/nsduh.htm). This survey also includes state-related information, which is available at [www.oas.samhsa.gov/states.cfm](http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/states.cfm).
- **Local information**, which you can obtain by contacting the Single-State Agency (SSA) in your state to customize your op-ed even further. Refer to the SSA Directory in the “Resources” section of this toolkit. State and some local information also are available from SAMHSA. SAMHSA’s **National Survey on Drug Use and Health** provides national and statewide drug use statistics, the **National Survey of Substance Abuse Treatment Services** profiles state treatment facilities, and the **Treatment Episode Data Set** is a resource for national and statewide demographic data, including commonly misused drugs. For more state and local information, visit <http://oas.samhsa.gov/geography.cfm>. Information on treatment facilities in your area can be found at [www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov](http://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov) or by calling 1-800-662-HELP.

**Placement Pointers:** Start early when submitting to your local newspaper. Many papers receive up to 500 submissions a week, so it helps to be ahead of the submission deadline. Call the paper about two months before **Recovery Month** kicks off and ask for the name of the editorial page editor. Then, contact that person to introduce yourself and your issue.

## Submitting Your Op-Ed

**Practice and know exactly what you will say** before calling the editor. Tell the editor that you are interested in submitting an op-ed during **Recovery Month** in September and ask about any specific guidelines (such as word count or submission deadlines). Also, it helps to ask for guidance that would help ensure placement, such as specific topics that would be of interest to their readers, including personal long-term recovery stories or specific research. When you call, be respectful of the editor’s time; ask if it is a good time to talk before you start presenting the topic.

**Understand the submission guidelines** and strictly adhere to them.

Many newspapers prefer submissions via e-mail, fax, or an online form on their Web sites, while some may ask you to send it via U.S. mail. Following their preferences will increase the chances of getting your op-ed placed. When you send your submission, include a cover letter that reminds the editor who you are and reference any previous contact you may have had. Highlight—clearly and concisely—why the subject is important to the newspaper’s readers.

**Make a follow-up call** approximately one week after submitting your op-ed to give time for the editor to review it. Confirm that the op-ed was received and answer any questions the editor may have. Offer to modify it if the editor has reservations about publishing it or suggestions on making it more compelling.

## Share Your Activities and Successes

**Share** your **Recovery Month** plans and activities with SAMHSA and the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), along with the general public. Post them on [www.recoverymonth.gov](http://www.recoverymonth.gov) to generate momentum for the campaign, which will touch millions of people who are affected by substance use disorders.

**Share** community success stories and other outreach efforts during **Recovery Month** by completing the “Customer Satisfaction Form” in this planning toolkit. Instructions are included on the form.

**Share** samples of your organization’s **Recovery Month** promotional materials with:

Office of the Director, Consumer Affairs  
SAMHSA’s Center for Substance Abuse Treatment  
1 Choke Cherry Road, Second Floor  
Rockville, MD 20857

## About **Recovery Month** and Substance Use Disorders

- **Sample materials** from this kit are available electronically at the **Recovery Month** Web site at [www.recoverymonth.gov](http://www.recoverymonth.gov).
- **For additional **Recovery Month** information**, visit the Web site or call 1-800-662-HELP.
- **Substance use disorder, treatment, and recovery information** is available at SAMHSA’s Web site at [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov).
- **Information on treatment options in your area** and the special services available can be found at [www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov](http://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov), a searchable database of more than 11,000 U.S. treatment facilities.



## MEDIA OUTREACH

Approximately 540 Words: Please Adapt With Your Own Compelling Personal Experiences.

[Date]

## The Importance of Individualized Treatment and Recovery For People With Substance Use Disorders

At first I didn't realize I was hurting myself and my family by abusing alcohol and drugs. Eventually, I understood that it had become a dependence—an illness that had taken over my life. But it didn't have to, and I hope my story of long-term recovery helps at least one person in **[community]** obtain the help he or she needs and on a path of recovery. In 2006, there were 22.6 million people aged 12 or older with a substance use disorder in the past year, and they all have stories.

**[Details about the author's personal journey through a substance use disorder, treatment, and recovery.]**

My story also is a call to action for our community leaders to increase support for people with substance use disorders and their families. By joining together, we can reduce barriers, such as stigma or a shortage of treatment programs. Doing so is well worth the effort. Substance use disorders are medical conditions, and treatment is just as effective as therapies used for conditions such as high blood pressure, asthma, and diabetes. Long-term recovery has changed my life and the lives of those around me and I now **[insert a positive statement about how you are enjoying long-term recovery.]**

I am glad my treatment program was designed specifically for me and that my family got the recovery support *they* need. Substance use disorders affect people in different ways, so it is critical to find an individualized path to recovery. Aligning treatment settings and services with each person's unique background, problems, and needs can help those in recovery regain strength and return to a productive life in the family, workplace, and society.

**[Use this paragraph only if local statistics are available.]** In our own community of **[city or region]**, **[number]** people suffer from substance use disorders, and countless numbers of them do not receive the same access to health care options they would if they had other chronic disorders, such as diabetes. These people are all around you—your neighbors, colleagues, and others.

Employers, faith-based groups, and policymakers need to understand that treatment is effective and recovery is possible. When doors are open to recovery, more people will seek treatment, reclaim their lives and health, and empower others to change. For example, **[name of facility]** in **[city]** informs our residents of the importance of treatment and encourages people to share personal stories of addiction and long-term recovery.

To promote the healing message of recovery, **[organization name]** is participating in the 19<sup>th</sup> annual observance of ***National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)***, a nationwide initiative every September supported by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. **[Organization name]** is holding a variety of educational events this month to coincide with this year's ***Recovery Month*** theme: ***"Join the Voices for Recovery: Real People, Real Recovery."*** The events in **[city/state]** include: **[briefly list events/activities]**.

By celebrating ***Recovery Month***, you are supporting those already in long-term recovery, like me, and encouraging those in need of help to seek treatment. Learning about these issues will make it easier to break down the barriers to treatment, and you will be investing in the best interests of all those in our community.

**[Your full name] is [insert your title/affiliation or other role in the substance use disorder field].**